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ABSTRACT

American "Baby Boomer" parents are organizing their elementary students' lives to automaticity. In the early grades, most students find this structure comfortable. Often by secondary school these parents step back, respecting their children's wishes. Here, however, the students face life and career selection with poor decision-making skills. This type of parenting style often leaves the students poorly prepared in decision-making skills. College professors have observed many students taking five or more years to obtain a bachelor's degree. This paper describes a research project that sought information from 15 other countries on how they work with these students. The five-year student was found to be the norm in colleges for many reasons. Increasing curricular demands, changing majors, and hours devoted to collegiate sports and extracurricular activities all add time. The paper suggests that a workable career decision early on would diminish many of the problems. Some factors considered include: (1) students liking their chosen field and enjoying the study of it; (2) students having proved their ability in the field; and (3) the college selected being a good fit for the student and the chosen career. In the survey of those who had changed majors to the point of delayed graduation, most said they had chosen a field in which they did not have talent or aptitude. Many things, including careers, are not as appealing as they had seemed once the close examination is made. Wonderful, exciting fields may appear to the college freshman which were unknown up to that point. This might be avoided with intelligent decision making and excellent guidance; however, within reason and made early on, changing majors can prevent commitment to the unfulfilling with a minimum loss of time. (JDM)

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# BENEVOLENT DICTATION TO GUIDANCE ABANDONMENT

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## ABSTRACT

American "Baby Boomer" parents are organizing their elementary students' lives to automaticity. The motives for this covers the full spectrum from the most benevolent to the most self-seeking. In early grades most students find structure comfortable. With great variation in ages, the divergent thinkers rebel in some manner. Often by secondary school these parents, from the "do your own thing generation," step back respecting their children's wishes. Here, however, the students face life and career selection with poor decision making skills. There are also the parents who conversely react to rebellion by tightening the reins to the point that they, in fact, are making all decisions for their children as a means of control. This parenting also leaves the student ill prepared in decision making skills. College professors have observed far too many students taking five or more years to obtain a trial and error bachelor's degree. Seeking an answer to relieve the problem, a research project has been undertaken asking how fifteen other countries work with their students. Those countries were visited over six years. The findings are ready.

## QUOTATIONS

Almost one hundred fifty years ago, a Wesleyan minister wrote, "A determined purpose in life and a steady adhesion to it through all disadvantages, are indispensable conditions of success." William M. Punshon (U.S.A.)

A contemporary of Punshon, but an attorney, stated, "It is a poor disgraceful thing not to be able to reply, with some degree of certainty to the simple question, What will you be? What will you do?" John Foster (U.S.A.)

## INTRODUCTION

During the Depression, families followed the time honored practice of including elderly relatives in their homes. The Greene Grandfather was no exception. Due to physical problems, "Grandpa" was no longer mentally alert. While his daughter-in-law was at a church meeting, the father of the family ran into an open cupboard door with such force that he was rendered



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unconscious. Returning home, Mrs. Greene found her husband on the kitchen floor. When she asked "Grandpa" why he hadn't called for help, he replied, "I had to find out who left the cupboard open."

THE PROBLEM

Who left the cupboard door open is not the emphasis here either. About seventy percent of our youth entering higher education at the twenty first century, are on the floor with Mr. Greene. However, part of the cause may be new, but the problem is anything but new as illustrated in the one hundred fifty year old stilted quotations. In sixteen seventy-eight, John Wray said that schoolboys are most wasteful as they were happy to receive nothing for their tuition. Causes vary, and often reflect the current era.

Most students wish to do well especially in areas that they find interesting. In the field of reading there is heavy documentation of students being able to read and comprehend written material well above their tested levels because of a keen desire to know the content. Automobile and motorcycle repair and maintenance manuals are notable for the percentage of comprehension that "cannot" happen. Regular content area teachers would be thrilled to do this, is they could be told realistically how to accomplish it. How does one get a class electrified by verb tenses? Yet using verb tenses correctly is essential to genuinely advancing in most areas and industries. Maturity is the secret to working on something that is useful but not exciting. Few students wish for the "Peter Pan Syndrome," which is "I don't want to grow up." Maturity aids in helping students obtain their goals. Goals not perceived or valued hold students back far more than a physical impediments. Goals involve decision making which are both cause and results of maturity.

The story is told of the two musicians who met in New York after years of separation. The first one asked the other where he was now playing, and received the answer, "Carnegie Hall." The second then asked how he might get there, to which the first replied, "Practice man, practice!" Decision making takes the same practice as music. Few highly successful musicians wait until their late teens to begin a musical instrument. Decision making needs to be practiced long before that age as well.

The current finger points toward the parents who through the most kindly of motives, or most self-seeking reasons, literally plan the elementary, middle school, and early secondary students' lives so minutely that all that is required of these students is to show up at the proper practice, game, or meeting. It may true that these students stay out of trouble because of the opportunity to find the undesirable, yet these same children haven't the time to mature either.

Generally speaking all of these sports, organizations, and lessons are quite meritorious in themselves. To name a few: baseball, basketball, football, soccer, swimming, Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, Campfire Girls, Candy Stripers, Boys' and Girls' Clubs, 4-H, dance, gymnastics, and numerous others. Each is excellent, and children should participate in some of these activities. Parents are involved in most of them, and that helps strengthen the family. However, milk is said

to be the perfect food, but too much milk can be deleterious if the child drinks copious quantities ignoring the other major food groups. College sports participants tell of vigorous daily practices which leaves them so exhausted that they fall asleep when they finally get to their lessons. If this true of top college athletes, it must also be true of their younger counterparts. Thus homework becomes secondary to the extra curricula.

Everyone needs "private time." If it could be packaged, patented, and marketed, the inventor would become the richest human in the world. The beauty of possessing this time is that each person could do with it exactly what he/she wishes. It may be speculated that many persons would use it as just quiet time to think. Possibly one could investigate a matter long held in abeyance. One could make a workable decision. Even the youngest elementary students need unstructured time. It is during this time that they learn to make decisions for themselves and avoid the "there's nothing to do syndrome." Making good decisions takes practice, practice. practice.

DECISIONS

All decisions are not good, and many are just passable. The results of an unwise decision can even last a lifetime. Rose was asked why she married her clearly undesirable husband. After her very long pause she replied, "Well, he asked me." Career choices may be made for equally inane reasons. Until the last third of the twentieth century, parents often tried to influence college aged students "to take over the family business, practice, or profession." Parents at least held the veto power. However, parents usually paid all the expenses, which carried more clout. With the GI Bill of Rights after World War II, the students gained a financial independence and far more decision freedom. These were men and women who were older than undergraduates had ever been, and their career views were usually realistic.

Most parents today would be most happy to send their children off to higher education free of financial concerns. Few have the ability to do this in our ever higher cost of living world; therefore, most students work as well as attend higher education. There is every conceivable combination of parents and student paying varying percentages of the costs. The student who bears all the expenses is not an oddity. The five year seniors is almost accepted as the norm. Money is not the only contributing factor; ever increasing curricular demands account for much of the increased time required. Add to this, changing majors, sometimes several times, keep the student an undergraduate far too long. Then, there are loans to be repaid by many in the early years of the acquired career.

A good workable career decision early on would diminish many of the problems. Here three factors come into play:

1) The student must like the chosen field and enjoy the study of it.
2) The students must have proven ability in this field and/or prerequisite courses preferably in secondary school.
3) The college chosen must be a good fit for the student as well as a good fit for the chosen career.

In the survey of those who had changed majors to the point of delayed graduation, most said they

had chosen a field in which they did not have talent or aptitude. If a student did not do well in secondary mathematics, even when an adequate effort was put forth, engineering should not be his/her major. There is the children's story about the young boy who attended a new elementary school. He was very shocked, because even though he had not done well in arithmetic at his old school, he did not do well in arithmetic at his new school.

Many things, including careers, are not as appealing as they had seemed once the closer examination is made. Early education affords contact with darling, loving little children; however, these same cherubs may have temper tantrums and vomit on the teachers' shoes. Wonderful exciting fields may appear to the college freshman which were unknown up to that point in time. These type of things might be avoided with intelligent decision making and excellent guidance; however, within reason and made early on, changing majors can save commitment to the unfulfilling with a minimum loss of time.

The value of excellent career counseling is not debatable. This is a long range goal. The personnel must be found and educated. The here and now lies in helping people to make realistic, rewarding decisions. Too many parents of students in their teens, think they have given the children the opportunity to make decisions; in reality these boys and girls are allowed free reign on mostly "small" matters. Teachers observe students in odd clothing as an expression of individuality. Allowing strange food choices (often not healthful) leave parents feeling helpless. Battles may erupt over homework, yet these same parents may not even question the 3 a.m. "ice time," so the child can play ice hockey, or the ten year old's traveling soccer team that has 9 p.m. week day games.

Some other countries seem as impotent as we. All of us offer some control through admission criteria. A few struggling colleges do admit students who are not academically competent. Nevertheless, most students entering higher education have the ability to obtain a four year degree.

In other countries in order to prepare better students, decisions to place them in a preparatory curriculum in very early teens has been in place for a long time. Our American students interviewed felt this was unfair. The citizens are the masters here. The Netherlands has workable compromise in many respects. In the early teens, they place their students in one of two higher education tracks or a vocational track. This is after much counseling, and testing all through the elementary years. Also, they allow parents to place a student in a desired track for a year to see how the student performs. Our schools are excellent for the most part, but at this point and time we do not have the personnel to implement such a plan.

What we can do is teach good decision making skills to parents and children alike. As of today we can help them stem the tide with decision making skills for higher education freshman. It is like cramming for an examination; it is a poor practice, but it surely beats no studying at all.

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